



Supporting Iowa's Family Caregivers

When a family member becomes seriously ill, the pressures of work and caring for a loved one can become too much to handle. In times like these, even the most loving and dedicated caregivers need a helping hand. Just ask the Collins Family of Iowa City.

Families – not social services agencies, nursing homes, or government programs – form the backbone of America's long term care system.

Two years ago, Grace Collins, now 64, was diagnosed with Pick's Disease, a form of dementia that causes memory loss, difficulty thinking or concentrating, and disturbances of speech. Grace's husband, Paul, took early retirement when it became clear that his wife needed full-time care.

While Paul took early retirement to care for his ailing wife, he still needed to work. That's where the Pathway's Adult Day Care Center in Iowa City came in. By caring for Grace two days a week, Pathways allows Paul to teach classes at the University of Iowa School of Dentistry.

I recently visited Pathways to highlight the critical services it provides and the importance of the National Family Caregiver Support Program, which provides funding to states, local area agencies on aging and other service providers to help families make the best choices about long term care for their loved ones. In Iowa, the program is known as the Iowa Family Caregiver Support Program.

It's important to note that families – not social services agencies, nursing homes, or government programs – form the backbone of America's long term care system. The Iowa Family Caregiver Support Program funds services that include adult day care and lend families a helping hand so that they can continue to care for their loved ones at home, not in a nursing home or assistive living facility.

Caregivers are under a great deal of pressure. Many are elderly themselves and worry that they may outlive the person they care for, and many have their own health problems. Others are working Iowans caring for both their own young children and an ailing parent. If the care provided by family members had to be replaced by paid home care staff, it could cost more than \$94 billion a year.

Iowa's aging population also places a premium on supporting family caregivers. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of Iowans 85 and older grew by almost 18 percent and those 75 to 84 grew by more than 10 percent. That's why support for the Iowa Family Caregiver Program is so important. It also provides information about other support services in the community, identifies whether a caregiver qualifies for financial assistance, and organizes family meetings to help loved ones discuss options for the care recipient.

I was proud to support the creation of the National Family Caregiver Program in 2000. Last year, I was able to increase funding for the program, providing \$1.6 million to support the efforts of the Iowa Family Caregiver Program.

This year, we have taken it a step further. As chairman of the Senate subcommittee that funds this program and others under the Older Americans Act, I worked on a bipartisan proposal with Republican Senator Arlen Specter that provided additional support for family caregivers.

The Iowa Family Caregiver Support Program is an important part of ensuring that older Iowans can live in dignity, at home, surrounded by their loved ones. That's why I've been proud to support this important initiative for Iowa's families.

For more information, contact the Iowa Family Caregiver Support Program toll free at Toll Free 1-866-4-NURTURE (1-866-468-7887). You can also visit them on the Web at <http://www.iowafamilycaregiver.org>.